

MEMBER IN DISCERNMENT FOUR WAY COVENANT

Introduction

With the writing of the updated Manual on Ministry, there has been a renewed interest and concentration on the Local Church and Covenant within the United Church of Christ. Section One, the Theological Grounding of the new Manual, states that covenantal polity is foundational to the United Church of Christ.

“Covenant-- the commitment of God to God’s people, of the people to God, of the people to one another as the Body of Christ-- is foundational to UCC identity and is at the heart of our governance.” *Manual On Ministry Section 1*

With this renewed sense of focus on covenant, the Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization Team is recommending that all Members in Discernment initiate a Four-Way Covenant with their Local Church of membership, the Discernment Committee of the Local Church, and the Association/Conference that is walking the ordination path with them.

The following is a suggested template for that Covenant. It recommends certain guidelines with the objective to enrich and enhance the relationships between all those involved in working with the MID through the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers towards ordination.

Furthermore, this template suggests specific tools for relationship building between the parties with the intention of building trust and transparency. The MESA Team feels that strengthening these relationships, requiring purposeful interchanges, writing requirements, meetings and prayer will not only benefit the Member In Discernment, but allow the Local Church congregation and the Discernment Committee a deeper insight into the progress of the MID and ultimately lead to a more truthful and informed assessment of the MID’s progress.

“The Member in Discernment process is intended to engage all discernment partners in reflection, conversation and assessment, so that the needs of the Church for excellent and faithful ministers may be met through wise decisions of Committees on Ministry, informed by all partners in the discernment process.” *Manual On Ministry, Section 2.1 Ministerial Authorization: Members in Discernment*

This template is meant to be tailored for each individual MID and Discernment Committee. The inclusions are suggestions which can be substituted, with other ideas, or expanded to encourage further conversation. Ultimately, the purpose of this covenant is to build and secure the relationships that are responsible for discerning a call to serve as an authorized minister of the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal.

MEMBER IN DISCERNMENT FOUR-WAY MINISTRY COVENANT

Among

Member in discernment

Local Church

Local Church Member in Discernment Committee

Central Association Committee on Ministry

ABOUT THE FOUR-WAY COVENANT

The United Church of Christ advises that, in instances where a Member In Discernment has been sponsored by a Local Church, a covenantal relationship be established among the Member In Discernment, the Local Church where the Member In Discernment is a member, the Local Church Discernment Committee and the United Church of Christ as represented by an Association or Conference. This relationship is known as a four-way covenant. The purpose of this covenant is:

1. to strengthen, support and sustain the ministries of all the partners that share in this covenant;
2. to encourage mutual participation and accountability of and for the life of each by the others;
3. to observe, nurture, celebrate and call forth the ministry of the Member In Discernment.

COVENANTS OF MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

_____, **covenants:**

To _____, *United Church of Christ in* _____:

- The MID should be a member in good standing of the congregation which is supporting them, and participate in its life through financial support for the general ministries of this church, participation in the worshiping life of the church whenever possible, and a commitment to earnest prayer for the well-being of this congregation and its ministry;
- The MID should communicate regularly with the congregation on how the journey is going through newsletter articles;
- The MID should meet annually with the Church Council to express thanks or ask for a deeper commitment from the congregation in their ongoing education and development;
- The MID should be in conversation with their pastor regarding the possibility of preaching experiences;
- Public recognition of membership in this Body of Christ of progress related to the MID's journey by way of reporting at the Annual Meeting of the Local Church.

To the _____, _____:

- The MID will attend Association and Conference Meetings whenever possible and, if not possible, provide explanation to the Association Committee on Church and Ministry (COM) regarding what is preventing attendance;
- The MID will adhere to oversight and all requirements as presented by COM, including the annual Information Review.

To the _____ Discernment Committee:

- Faithfulness in the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, when asked by Local Church pastor, and an adherence to the Minister Codes of the Manual on Ministry;
- Fidelity to the terms of this covenant with the commitment to meet with the Local Church Discernment Committee at least every-other month. Additionally, the Member In Discernment should foster trust and transparency with Committee members so that this Committee evolves in its purpose: a place where the MID can share about challenges encountered knowing that there is confidentiality. And, a place where the Discernment Committee can share openly and truthfully about the MID's progress.

United Church of Christ, as the Local Church of Membership covenants:

To _____:

- The congregation will pray for the MID and the Local Church Discernment Committee and their journey;
- The congregation values and will include written materials and active participation from the MID that will make the MID's journey more public, more transparent;
- The congregation will keep the MID in the forefront of the ongoing ministry of the Local Church;
- The Church Council will meet with the MID annually for support and accountability.

To the _____ Discernment Committee:

- Openly encourage and receive concerns and joys from the congregation about the development and progress of _____.

To the _____, _____

- Appropriate documentation of _____; meet with the Association/Conference Committee, as a show of support with the MID when asked;
- Annual contributions to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) in recognition of the role of the wider church in the formation and oversight of authorized ministers in the United Church of Christ.

The _____, _____ of the United Church of Christ covenants:

To the _____:

- Full support, including holding MID in prayer, during this time of discernment;
- Clear communication of this Association's/Conference's requirements and expectations of the MID, including meetings with the MID;
- Clear communication of this Association's/Conference's support of and for the MID, including a vested interest in their education and possible financial support through scholarships.

To _____:

- Appropriate support and oversight of MIDs in covenants with your Local Church and the Local Church Discernment Committee;
- The Association/Conference Committee will attempt to report/convey, from time to time, through the Local Church pastor or the Local Church Discernment Committee their insight into how the Local Church's MID is doing as a result of their meetings with the MID.

To the _____ Discernment Committee:

- Written communication outlining specific steps of the MID, the Local Church Discernment Committee and the Association/Conference during this discernment process;
- Written communication to the Local Church Discernment Committee following each step when a determination is made as to whether to continue the discernment process with the MID or not;
- The Association/Conference Committee has a responsibility to the Discernment Committee to know how the Association/Conference Committee members are seeing the MID evolve.

The _____ Discernment Committee (LCDC) covenants:

To _____:

- Belief in God's call that has led you to this particular place of ministry;
- Ongoing support and encouragement during this time of discernment;
- Possible financial support by way of special offerings for specific need(s) as appropriate.

To _____ United Church of Christ in _____:

- Belief in the local church as the locus for all ministry in the United Church of Christ and thankfulness for your support of the LCDC and _____;
- Annual reporting to Church Council on MID’s progress and information from Association/Conference regarding MID’s progress.

To the _____, _____:

- Representative attendance at meetings between the MID and Association/Conference Committee to offer supportive comments, challenges, and/or approval;
- Fidelity to the covenants of mutual accountability as articulated in this document.

We trust in God’s presence with us as we seek to be faithful to this covenant:

MID Signature _____ Date _____

Moderator, _____, _____ Date _____

Chair, _____ Discernment Committee Date _____

Representative, _____ of the _____ Date _____

Received by _____ Date _____